From: Timothy A. Seufert
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 8:19pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I write as a citizen concerned with the Proposed Final Judgement in
United States v. Microsoft.

There are numerous problems with the proposed settlement plan. For
example, it appears that looseness in definitions will allow
Microsoft to change the names of products mentioned in the settlement
plan to avoid obeying the proposed behavioral restrictions. The plan
must be very cautiously reworded to prevent Microsoft from exploiting
loopholes.

More importantly, I feel there are basic deficiencies in the plan's
coverage of the numerous ways in which Microsoft enforces its
monopolies. One which seems obvious to me is the lack of a remedy
for Microsoft's use of closed file formats.

Microsoft uses closed file formats to help sustain their monopoly on
office productivity software. Microsoft's office productivity suite
owns most of the market; most organizations have standardized on it
and own no other software covering its functionality. As a user of
alternate operating systems (MacOS X and Linux) I often find that
such organizations cannot generate or accept anything but Word
documents, even when I try to use a more open and crossplatform
format like Adobe's PDF.

For example, I am presently looking for a job, and so far as I can
tell all the HR departments and job placement firms who deal with my
profession (electrical engineering) more or less require electronic
resume submissions to be in Word format. This is in Silicon Valley,
the heart of anti-Microsoft sentiment! Microsoft's lock on this kind
of software is that strong.

The result of such social pressure is that I must either expend
continual effort educating people about how to use formats other than
Word (not a good idea to annoy people this way when I'm in the
position of looking for a job, I might add!), or I must buy a copy of
Word so that I can read and write the de facto standard file format.
In practice, few people are willing to take on the persnal cost of
the first option.

From another point of view, an organization which wishes to convert
from Microsoft's office package to somebody else's faces a huge

migration issue. Organizations become locked in to using Microsoft's
software because there is no easy way for them to convert their
document archives.

If Microsoft's file formats were open, it would be easier for
alternative productivity software to gain entry to the market. It is
routine for those who do try to compete with Microsoft in this area
to reverse engineer Microsoft's formats, but Microsoft is always
playing a game of changing the formats with each new Office release
so that everybody with the latest version of Word/Excel/etc. is
generating documents incompatible with other software. Furthermore,
the quality of support is never as good as it could be were
Microsoft's file formats open.

To summarize, competitive office products must read and write
Microsoft's file formats with a high degree of compatability.
Through obscurity and constant change of these formats, Microsoft has
created an artificial barrier to entry. In order to break down that
barrier, Microsoft should be required to fully document its file
formats in a timely fashion. Ideally they would have to keep the
public informed of future changes, rather than just documenting what
happened after the fact.

Similar concerns probably apply to areas other than office
productivity software, but I wanted to comment on something that has
impacted me personally.

In closing, I'd like to think you for your consideration in reading
my comments.

--
Tim Seufert